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ABSTRACT

The Seniors Teaching Seniors project was conducted at the Columbia University Brookdale Institute on Aging and Adult Development to train older adults to communicate more effectively their skills and expertise. Older adults were to develop teaching skills so that they could conduct classes at senior centers. Two older-adult volunteers were selected from various senior centers to attend a special interdisciplinary class on teaching methods at Columbia University. The classes were comprised of 15 to 20 persons and taught by faculty from the higher and adult education, history, and nutritional departments, as well as from institutional support services and social work departments. The course consisted of eight lessons covering the following subjects: introduction to the course and information about videotaping; normal aging and group process skills: teaching skills; nutrition and current events used as examples of course content; resource identification; and communication and marketing skills. The class was conducted as a test of the model program designed to structure and conduct the lessons, including practice presentations by the senior citizens that were videotaped and played back for class discussion. A follow-up study showed that 82 percent of the participatns were teaching a course or preparing to do so and that all participants reported an increase in confidence in their communication skills. (KC)

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A DEMONSTRATION PROGRAM FOR TRAINING SENIOR TEACHERS

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A Demostration Program for Training Senior Teachers

Introduction

The purpose of the Seniors Teaching Seniors project of the Columbia University Brookdale Institute on Aging and Adult Development is to train older adults to become effective communicators of their skills and expertise. It is intended to strengthen the networks of senior adults existing in senior centers by training selected members in the basic knowledge and skills of teaching others.

This model educational project addresses two community problems of the elderly in our society today. The first is the rapidly increasing number of healthy, active elderly who are retired and who turn to a senior center to find meaningful activities. The other is the increasing number of "new" aged who have professional skills or specialized expertise upon retirement but do not feel a senior center meets their needs. This project addresses the lifelong learning needs of both categories of older people.

The project grows out of: a) a recognition and appreciation of the importance of education and intellectual stimulation for the mental health of older persons; b) an understanding of the special needs of the well elderly and retired workers to continue applying their skills, use their time effectively and retain their sense of social worth and self-esteem through teaching and service roles; c) the advisability of involving students in

the organization of teaching and training initiatives among their elders. The fact that the program is campus-based exemplifies a commitment of the university to the community, particularly its burgeoning population of elderly.

The target population served by this type of project can be characterized as healthy and active, seeking to restructure their time, interested in doing more for themselves and others, and affiliated with a senior center. The participants expressed interest in the project by filing an application and stating their willingness to travel by public transportation to the training site.

Theoretical Premises

Higher education institutions in general have been slow to respond to the educational needs of older adults. Various studies have shown that less than 3 percent of those over age 60 are enrolled in higher education institutions (Shepherd '80, Heisel et al '81). The studies also document that as many as 50 percent of the elderly want to continue their education. Shepherd (1980) believes the low enrollment levels are due to a lack of knowledge of what is there and a lack of confidence on the part of the older learner. The pervasive stereotypes of the elderly, including the popularized belief of "not being able to teach an old dog new tricks," may become a self-fulfilling prophecy unless aggressive outreach and recruitment efforts are undertaken to reassure the older person they are capable of learning.

How participation is defined is an additional issue raised by Heimstra (1976). He estimates that many elderly undertake self-directed learning pro-

jects, their involvement totalling 324 hours annually on the average. Defination of participatation aside, low utilization of universities and colleges exists which could be better tapped by older adults.

Weinstein suggests that two trends are emerging which will force educational institutions to respond. The first trend is the obvious demographic shift, creating a nation of older people. The second is the increased awareness at the national policy level that education is as necessary for the old as for the young. The elimination of mandatory retirement policies in the future would conceivabley create a tremendous demand for "retooling" older adults for second, third and fourth careers. The present state of technological advance is already requiring a certain level of retooling for the middle age group.

Those who do participate in adult education tend to have higher levels of educational attainment and income are are more likely to be white and female. People in their 60s, retired professionals with college degrees and higher incomes are more likely to take job-related or career-oriented courses. The older adult with less education is more likely to prefer courses related to personal improvement. In the project described in this paper, the goal of enhancing the capacity of older adults to teach others was achieved with both professional and non-professional retired persons.

A process of transendence of past roles, according to Moody (1978), facilitates the older adults reaching out for new experiences and growth. McCluskey (1974) aptly categorized the specific learning needs of the elderly. They included:

Coping needs. These relate to the maintenance of adequate social, physical and psychological well-being. This category includes basic ed-

ucational and life-oriented competencies seniors need to function as full members of society.

Influence needs. These emcompass the procreative aspects of coping needs. This area includes the individual's need to shape the world as a social change agent.

Expressive needs. These reflect the older person's interest in activities of an intrinsic value. Usually, fulfilling these needs allows the individual to satisfy drives that have been unexpressed or underexpressed in earlier years.

Contributive needs. These arise from the older person's drive to impart skill or broader wisdom to others. Much of this need stems from the fact that older persons have much to share as a result of their experiences and want to be helpful to their fellow citizens.

Transcendence needs. These mirror a strong imperative for continued growth and self-fulfillment. Interests related to this goal enable older adults to gain a critical perspective on past roles and actions and to experience a sense of personal integrity during the later years.

There are a variety of factors which account for low participation rates by older adults of any age in our educational institutions. According to Spencer (1980). They may take the following form:

Informational barriers produce inadequate awareness of resources available. It can only be overcome by concentrated publicity and recruitment efforts with the older adult.

Situational Barriers are those such as health related problems of the older adult which reduce thier mobility. Transportation cost or its unavailability is a frequent barrier in this category.

Institutional barriers, while sometimes inadvertant, are those that discourage participation by older adults. Costly fees, inaccessible locations, and complex registration procedures are illustrative of this category.

Attitudinal barriers are negative stereotypes pervading society which depict the elderly as unable to learn and mentally deteriorating. Older adults can internalize these false sterotypes and be reluctant to venture into an educational setting. Goodrow (1975) points out that many elderly are embarassed by their lack of educational achievement and choose not to enter into a setting which rekindles feelings of inferiority.

Developing a "senior oriented" learning experience meant to dispell the current myths and stereotypes of the older learner became the guiding premise behind the Seniors Teaching Seniors project. A positive learning climate as characterized by Malcom Knowles (1970) is one that promotes trust, respect, helpfulness and physical comfort with the group. The program emphasized personalized meanings for each participant. Every student was admitted with the understanding (expressed in the form of a verbal contract) that he/she would return to their senior center and teach a course at the conclusion of the training sequence. This agreement was reinforced in discussions with senior center directors and became a practical illustration of "shared responsibility" for learning outcomes. The physical setting for classes, the Columbia University School of Social Work, utilizes a lounge and classroom setting combination to foster a more relaxed, informal learning environment.

Sensitivity to the wide array of student experiences and backgrounds on the part of the staff and faculty is an important element in planning the overall program. Relating the curriculum to individuals requires great

flexibility as documented by Wass et al (1974). It is also wise to keep the training class to a reasonable size. In this project 15-20 per class was considered maximum. It is improtant for the staff of the project to set the mood and tone of the course and each subsequent session. Instilling the confidence in each participant to achieve their self-directed learning goals is foremost in the actions of the staff.

Pilot Project Design

The specific objectives of the Seniors Teaching Seniors project were to recruit at least thirty older adults who have an affiliation with a senior center; to enlist the cooperation of senior center administrative staff from those centers; to design and conduct an eight module training course; to involve major university departmental faculty; to provide educational consultation to trainees upon completion of the course; and to involve graduate students in all phases of the project.

Stage one may be described as the definition and involvement of strategic constituences. Establishment of a community advisory committee is an important beginning step. Representatives from key city and private agencies involved in programs for older adults were invited to join. The advisory committee confirmed the need for such a project and served a particularly useful role in developing effective outreach and recruitment methods. In addition, the committee helped identify content areas for the training curriculum.

The major city offices responsible for funding senior centers in New York City were represented on the committee. This proactive move has paved the way for a cooperative partnership between the university and the commun-

ity. It eases the immediate "turf" issue in that the university community is reaching out to offer a unique training opportunity not offered by community groups. The university is providing an educational opportunity it feels most competent to provide (i.e., pedagogical skills development) while being advised as to specific community needs in the educational domain. An illustration of the cooperative support received by the project is the volunteering of time by members of the advisory committee to carry out observational visits at senior center class sites and offer the older teachers constructive criticism and support.

Outreach and recruitment efforts proved to be a critical stage in the development of the project. Informational letters and course application forms were sent to every senior center or organized group of older adults known to the local Area Agency on Aging in the predetermined section of New York City. A second letter, project flyer and more application forms were mailed three weeks later. Follow-up telephone calls are made to all inquiries expressing interest in the program. In some cases, a staff member visits the center and talks with program personnel and center members about the program. Contact with center program personnel is important for establishing mutually agreeable contracts so that potential participants can return to their center and be supported in teaching a course. In addition, personalized outreach proved helpful toward breaking down the myth of the university setting serving only young people. A policy decision to limit the number of students from any one senior center to two was established to insure that a larger number of centers would acquire trained teachers available within their membership. Two participants from a center is deemed beneficial in insuring reciprocal support for students while attending the training sessions as well as back at the center.

The course application form gathers information on the applicant's occupational background, teaching experience, fields of interest for teaching and senior center affiliation. Telephone interviews with the applicant to discuss their interest in teaching and then a telephone discussion with the senior center director or program director sets the stage for contracting. The contract requires a commitment from the older adult and the senior center director that upon completion of the course, the older adult will teach a course at the center. Applications are handled on a first come first serve basis with those applying too late being placed on a waiting list. Some overadmittance to the program is recommended in anticipation of normal attrition.

Personal letters of acceptance to each individual and a letter to their senior center director notifying him/her of the selection of one of their members for the course are mailed. Reiteration of the goals of the program, particularly the contract for teaching a course upon its conclusion, is important at the point of acceptance into the program. The participants are divided into two groups based on prior teaching experience and educational background.

Design of the course curriculum is a phase necessarily overlapping with the outreach and recruitment stage of project development. Based on previously identified needs assessement findings, as gleaned from student application forms, four subject areas emerged as pertinent. They are teaching methods, substantive areas, course support and group skills.

Teaching methods are considered the unique key to the "train the trainer" model. Two sessions are devoted to the theory and practice of course design and teaching methods. These sessions employ a variety of teaching methods including lecturette, demonstration, discussion, brainstorming, and question-

ing. The session instructor serves as a role model for students in addition to the source of specfic content on the subject of pedagogy.

Two substantive areas, identified as areas of interest by participants, became the subject vehicle for illustrating a number of possible course designs. Using subject areas of common interest not only provides helpful information but it allows the student to observe new pedagogical methods in action. (The two areas of interest drawn from student applications were nutrition and current events).

Course support areas refers to two additional sujects considered important to the curriculum. Resource identification methods is the topic of one session which provides the knowledge and skills necessary for identifying course topics and materials. It focuses on identifying and utilizing library and community resources. Participants are encouraged to use the session to seek guidance and assistance in identifying resources pertinent to their particular teaching topic of interest. Class illustrations relate to nutrition and current events, the substantive areas illustrated.

Another topical area of course supports devotes itself to marketing skills. This session was designed to assist the participants in gaining the competence necessary to plan a successful job search and develop their own course publicity. Two representatives from organizations recruiting older adult teachers were invited to the session to make brief presentations to the students. This is a "bridging" technique to prepare the students to undertake their own job search outside their senior center.

The fourth area of curriculum development is categorized as group skills. It encompasses an overview of the normal aging process and specific group discussion skills. Because most of the participants' teaching will take place in group settings, it is particularly important to equip the

students with basic group process skills. The session begins with an introduction to the theories of aging and the normal aging process and then moves to group leadership skills. Special emphasis is placed on how to prevent or cope with common problems in groups such as members who are too demanding, too talkative, too passive or are scapegoats for the group.

Enhancement of their own personal communication style is the focus of the videotape recording and playback session. Participants volunteer to give a brief introductory presentation on their proposed course; it is videotaped and immediately played back. The teacher and participants provide constructive criticism for each presentation. This session provides an excellent means of confidence building within a supportive environment. Experience suggest that this session should occur later in the training sequence giving participants an opportunity to gain an accurate view of the course and become comfortable within the group format.

The topics of the eight sessions of the curriculum are summarized as follows:

Session I	Introduction and Film
Session II	Normal Aging and Group Process Skills
Session III	Teaching Skills, Part I
Session IV	Nutrition and Current Events
Session V	Resource Identification
Session VI	Teaching Skills, Part II
Session VII	Communication and Marketing Skills
Session VIII	Completion

Engagement of an interdisciplinary teaching faculty is important. Collaboration with the university's continuing education director can be most helpful in identifying faculty as well as utilizing established contacts in the aging network. Representatives from Columbia University's Department of Higher and Adult Education, Department of History, Institute of Human Nutrition, Department of Institutional Support Services and

School of Social Work were identified as appropriate faculty for this project.

Potential faculty members are contacted individually, the project described and their interest ascertained prior to offering a teaching position. Faculty having prior teaching experience with older adults or a special interest in adult education is an important criterion for instructor selection. Written communication specifying the details of the faculty members obligations and appropriate follow up by project staff are not to be overlooked. A meeting of faculty is held prior to innaugeration of the course to reiterate the goals of the course and reinforce the concept that the implementation of the course is to both impart knowledge and serve as a working example of a model course in action for participants. Each faculty member submitted a session outline and materials needed two weeks prior to their assigned session.

The curriculum prepared; the faculty selected; the participants admitted; the course is ready for delivery. The participants are divided in two groups, both meet on the same day of the week for two hours in a campus classroom. Offering the sessions to the two groups on the same day is advantageous for scheduling of faculty. Obtaining teacher commitments for one full day (an a.m. and a p.m. class) is likely to be easier than on two different half days. University students and faculty members are present in the building on the day the classes are offered allowing for intergenerational exchange and reinforcement of the concept of an integrated university-community education experience.

Refreshments are served prior to the onset of each session thus facilitating a friendly, informal atmosphere and fostering socialization.

Travel by public transportation is reimbursed at each session.

The final session of the course concludes with a ceremony recognizing the students successful completion of the course. A guest speaker provides an enthusiastic "send-off" to students to go out and share their knowledge with others. Directors of the senior centers who had participants in the program are invited. This continues the reinforcement of the "contract" all parties have agreed to at the beginning of the program.

Evaluation of the project is formally accomplished by administration of a pre- and post- informational survey. The instrument collects personal and demographic data including education, race/ethnicity, occupational status, affiliation and participation in an organized senior center. Questions regarding their teaching interests and self-perception of teaching skills are important data for later comparison. The post-informational survey repeats relevant questions regarding participant's perception of their teaching skills and ascertains their opinion of the training course.

Students receive a pre-coded instrument insuring that names do not appear on the form and confidentiality is guaranteed. The 'demonstration' aspect of the Seniors Teaching Seniors is reinforced and the pre- and post-evaluation forms are called "surveys" rather than "tests" to avoid the threatening connotation of the latter.

The importance of evaluating course offerings by student upon returning to their center is stressed. Sample guidelines for basic methods of evaluation are covered in the curriculum as well as modeled in the programs own course evaluation. Informal observational evaluation methods such as talking with participants, faculty and senior center

personnel are also used. Both types of evaluation reveal a positive response to the program.

A demonstration project such as this one is ideal for providing unique learning opportunities within the university for graduate students having interests in program development, implementation and evaluation and educational gerontology. This project utilized graduate students from social work, media, and research.

Applied Methods

The eight week course is designed as a model for older students to observe in terms of the mechanics of its operation, curriculum content, course sequences and exposure to teacher role models. Presenting a good model for teachers-in-training is essential, otherwise one finds oneself apologizing for "do as I say, not as I do." Students were asked to prepare their first lesson according to the format taught. This provides an excellent opportunity for students to simulate their first lesson within a supportive learning environment. It brings the abstractness of "a lesson plan" to the concrete level of "my lesson plan". Individual feedback is given to students privately by the faculty member.

Utilization of videotaping and instant replay is an attractive method for training. Caution should be taken, however, to introduce the video equipment to the group early in the training course. This allows participants to see and hear themselves before being asked to make individual presentations. Fifteen minutes of the second session was used for this purpose. The camera scans the group during a discussion period. Participants watch the playback, seeing and hearing

themselves as recorded. Reminders during the subsequent sessions about the upcoming videotape procedure to be performed in session VII are made.

Participants are asked to prepare a brief introduction to their course for the video session and deliver it before the class. Self criticism is first invited after the playback by the faculty member in charge. The group tends to provide positive reinforcement. Criticisms, if any, are stated supportively. The video session tends to serve a confidence building function for the participants.

Focusing on the contract of teaching a course upon completion of the program prompts the participants to test out their ideas on one another, to share ideas and resources early on. Initially staff helps to foster this 'networking' concept but it very quickly catches on among the group members. The success of the idea exchange is demonstrated in the project by the participants requesting a name and telephone directory before the conclusion of the course. In addition, a clearinghouse type function for 'senior teachers' was requested by the students. Program staff maintain a list of those areas of student teaching expertise and refer graduates to groups known to be looking for teachers.

Creating an environment for learning which is supportive and enhances confidence is an important concern to be addressed by the project staff and faculty. It is accomplished by a well planned curriculum that attempts to individualize the learning process and is carried out by a sensitive staff.

Follow Up

The nature of the 'contract', seniors to teach seniors, promotes

a follow-up process. The graduates and their respective senior center directors or program personnel need to be contacted regularly. Answering questions, providing linkages to other potential teaching sites, and giving consultation on new course ideas are routine activities of follow-up. Four to six weeks following the course, contact is made with each graduate to inquire about the course they are teaching or to determine progress on the course they are planning to teach. Two months after graduation, a letter is sent, checking on their progress and giving information on sites needing teachers.

Reunions of the graduates are scheduled for six and twelve months after the course ends. This provides an opportunity for graduates to obtain specific help on course material, update skills, and provide feedback to the staff on areas to enhance future training curricula.

A teacher roster, fulfilling the clearinghouse role is maintained by the program staff. Continuing contact with organizations utilizing older adult teachers is also an important task to assist in the linkage and contractual process. There is an additional educational element in the follow-up process with senior centers. Many times, center directors have overlooked the talent and expertise of their own constituents and encouragement to utilize the senior teachers is necessary. This is particularly well received as funds for programming within centers continuilly diminish.

Conclusion

A positive response to the program and significant self-perceived growth emerged from the evaluation of the project participants.

While not formally surveyed, the senior centers utilizing the older teachers also provided positive feedback on its success. The follow-up contact with graduates revealed 82 percent already teaching or committed to a teaching position in Fall, 1982. The contributions of this program appear to be multiple including the emphasis on pedagogy, the marketing skills focus, a concern for the needs of the 'new aged', and reaffirming the university serving as a setting for a partnership with the community in meeting the learning needs of older adults.

There are a growing number of innovative programs which promote the use of older adults in a teaching capacity. They include the Traveling Teacher concept of the University of Wisconsin which brings school to the community and the Institute of Study for Older Adults in New York City, which prefers hiring older adults to assume the actual teaching roles and was one of the first groups to teach courses in nursing homes. The Faye-McBeath Institute of the University of Wisconsin at Madison developed the concept of Community Based Learning Centers for older adults. Certainly there are a number of university based settings which are experimenting with providing continuing education to older adults by older adults. Program adaptations are only restricted by one's own capability to envision programs and of course to secure funding.

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